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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [EC](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: ECUADOR REACTION TO COLOMBIAN OPERATION AGAINST
THE FARC

Classified By: DCM Jefferson Brown for Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

11. (C) Summary. Although the Correa administration's reaction to the news of the Colombian military's operation against the FARC in Ecuadorian territory was initially cautious, the GOE's position increasingly hardened after learning that the operation was not a "hot pursuit" scenario but planned in advance with the FARC bombed and attacked while sleeping, in direct contrast with what President Uribe reportedly told President Correa via telephone on March 1. The GOE and Ecuadorian press have characterized the incident a clear violation of international law and norms, and Correa has broken off diplomatic relations with Colombia. The GOE vehemently denies that they maintained any inappropriate contacts with the FARC. End Summary.

GOE Responds to Colombian Incursion and "Lies"

12. (SBU) Correa initially received a phone call from Uribe during his weekly presidential radio address on March 1, shortly after 8am, to inform him of the incursion of the Colombian military into Ecuador. Correa returned to continue the address and to explain that Colombian troops had killed FARC members in Ecuadorian territory in self-defense. Acting cautiously, Correa limited himself to the need to clarify facts further, while lamenting the loss of life and reiterating Ecuador's position that neither Colombian military nor FARC incursions into Ecuadorian territory could be tolerated. The GOE subsequently lodged a formal complaint to Colombia and recalled the Ecuadorian Ambassador for consultations.

13. (SBU) Correa's position hardened, however, after Minister of Defense Wellington Sandoval and Minister of Coordination of Internal and External Security Gustavo Larrea visited the site of the attack, leading to the realization that the information provided by Uribe was inaccurate. In an address from the presidential palace on March 2, Correa said that Ecuador suffered "a planned aerial attack followed by an incursion of troops with full awareness that they were violating our sovereignty." Correa stated that "this shows that the (Colombian) Ministry of Defense, Foreign Ministry and President Uribe are lying to Ecuador." Correa added that what occurred on Saturday "is the most serious, cunning and verified aggression that Uribe's government has carried out against Ecuador." During a March 3 Foreign Ministry briefing to the diplomatic corps, a military official explained how the GOE could be certain based on ballistic evidence at the site that the Colombian aircraft flew further into Colombia

and then attacked from the south, and Foreign Minister Salvador cited at length the legal instruments the GOC had violated.

¶4. (SBU) President Correa, who canceled his planned trip to Cuba for an economic conference in order to deal with this situation, convoked on March 3 a meeting of his National Security Council (COSENA) to analyze the situation along the Northern Border as well as its diplomatic relations with Colombia. Foreign Minister Salvador initially stated that the incident on Saturday left diplomatic relations with Colombia "weakened," and that the GOE was "evaluating the facts in order to avoid affecting in some way the ties between our two peoples." Vice Foreign Minister Jose Valencia complained to the DCM on March 3 that "the Colombian government should have consulted with the GOE prior to entering Ecuadorian soil to receive the GOE's authorization, using normal military channels such the Bilateral Border Commission (COMBIFRON), or even a phone call from Uribe to Correa ten minutes beforehand." Correa decided to break off diplomatic relations with Colombia, effective March 3.

No U.S. Involvement

¶5. (C) Correa has not cast blame on the United States in any of his comments, nor has the GOE made any such official statements. However, in a television interview, retired Colonel Jorge Brito, ex-soldier and military trainer and an outspoken critic of the U.S., claimed the U.S. had to have provided satellite information to the GOC, likely supported by AWACS flights out of the Manta Forward Operating Location (FOL). A Socialist Party communique made a similar

insinuation, and called for an "audit" of FOL operations.

¶6. (C) The DCM assured Vice FM Valencia on March 3 that the Manta FOL was in no way involved and that no AWACS flights had operated out of the FOL around the time of the incident. Valencia, who took the call during the 5-hour COSENA meeting chaired by Correa on Monday morning, thanked the DCM for what he called "very important information."

Ecuador Military Mobilizes

¶7. (C) Minister of Defense Sandoval stated publicly that Ecuador is mobilizing troops to the Northern Border to protect Ecuadorian sovereignty "no matter who may try to offend it." Ecuadorian military sources have provided the embassy estimates on troops mobilizing to the Northern Border that range from 3,000 to 4,500, including all of the Fourth Division. This is roughly in line with normal full complement levels for the entire Northern Border region, and it does not appear from our reports on the ground that actual enhanced mobilization is in excess of several hundred near the site itself and adjacent checkpoints. MOD Sandoval said that "Ecuadorian armed forces are ready for any confrontations, having already had confrontations with the FARC in the past, and that this would be nothing new." Sandoval noted that the three wounded insurgents were receiving humanitarian assistance and medical treatment at a military hospital in Quito, and that the bodies of others killed in the attack were being transported to Quito after having been initially taken to the regional capital of Lago Agrio.

GOE Denies Inappropriate FARC Ties

¶8. (SBU) In response to the Colombian Defense Minister's accusations that Coordinating Minister of Internal and External Security Gustavo Larrea had meetings with Raul Reyes, Ecuadorian Vice Defense Minister Carvajal asserted that this accusation was a "gross misrepresentation". During the March 3 diplomatic corps briefing, FM Salvador referred to Correa's earlier statements that the GOE offered itself as a go-between to assist with negotiating hostages' release and

that Larrea would be the emissary to the GOC.

¶9. (SBU) Larrea confirmed in a later press conference that he did have a meeting with Raul Reyes and separately with another FARC representative, but under the parameters of peace efforts and with the single aim of achieving the freedom of FARC-held hostages. He noted that the meetings had occurred following a December 31 meeting of himself and other international emissaries with President Uribe to discuss approaches toward the hostage situation. Larrea strongly denied that the GOE had a relationship with the FARC, saying it only had relationships with sovereign countries.

Public Reaction

¶10. (SBU) In general, all political sectors and the press condemned the incursion of the Colombian military into Ecuador as an unacceptable violation of Ecuadorian sovereignty. Some articles noted the comments of freed hostages on the FARC, including its presence in Ecuador, while others discussed how this incident has dealt a heavy blow to the FARC. Simon Pachano, political analyst at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), commented that "there were two incursions, first by irregular forces and then by the Colombian military."

¶11. (SBU) A small component of the political opposition raised concerns that the Correa government was not doing enough to protect Ecuadorian sovereignty. In a quarter page letter appearing in major newspapers, Humberto Mata, Director of the center-right Ecuadorian Force movement (FE), demands an explanation for the presence of the FARC in Ecuadorian territory and asked why the GOE doesn't "join in efforts with Colombia to detain the insurgents, instead of joining in chorus with Chavez." On the other end of the political spectrum, the radical Popular Democratic Movement (MPD) condemned Reyes' killing as an assassination and demonstrated

in front of the Colombian Embassy on March 3.

Comment

¶12. (C) The Colombian operation against the FARC undoubtedly will continue to be a source of friction between Ecuador and Colombia and an opportunity for Chavez to play to Ecuadorian leftists, and even moderates. It will seriously damage recent positive trends in Ecuador-Colombia relations, including improved recent cooperation between Colombian and Ecuadorian military, police and intelligence elements. If there was any doubt among the Ecuadorian polity and general public that the FARC have a presence in Ecuador, that can no longer be questioned. We can only hope that this point will not be forgotten amid the emotionally-charged nationalistic response to the GOC's dramatic action.

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